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ABSTRACT

A new discovery at Ephesus appears to belong to a widespread category of Late Antique texts, referring to donors and others anonymously as ‘those known to God’. The new discovery suggests more interpretations of that phrase; in some cases it may be that anonymity is assumed to avoid *pthonos/invidia*. Such thinking could also lie behind the use of monograms as building inscriptions.

INTERPRETING THE SIGNS: ANONYMITY AND CONCEALMENT IN LATE ANTIQUE INSCRIPTIONS.

Charlotte Roueché

I first got to know Averil when I was one of a group who worked together on that rich and difficult text, the *Parastaseis* of Constantinople. We met for several months; the results of our work were eventually pulled together and published by Averil and Judith Herrin, who was later to be her successor and my colleague at King’s.¹ The whole undertaking was a model of co-operation and of leadership on Averil’s part.

That text reflects, among other things, activities of the factions at Constantinople, probably drawn from their records. It also gives a sense of the interaction between people and the images which surrounded them. In the provinces of the Empire, we do not often have literary sources to give us an idea of such activities; but we do have the archaeological context which is missing in Constantinople. In recent years I have been fortunate enough to be able to pursue some of this material in the enormously rich site of Ephesus, where I have benefited from the generous hospitality, and intellectual engagement, of the Austrian excavators, and also from the profound learning and epigraphic flair of my colleague Denis Feissel, another friend of Averil’s, whose contribution to the following article will be readily apparent.

¹ Averil Cameron and Judith Herrin, *Constantinople in the early eighth century*, (Leiden, 1984).

The so-called Embolos, or Kuretes Street at Ephesos is, in its present form, a late Antique environment, which took shape over the fourth and fifth centuries.² This part of the city was excavated at considerable speed in the 1950s, and publication of the material was affected by the sudden death of Franz Miltner, in 1959.³ This explains some omissions in the recording and publication of texts.

The upper – southern - part of the Embolos is demarcated at its southern end by a late antique gateway, the ‘Arch of Herakles’. The road then descends in a more or less straight line to the Fountain of Trajan, before veering slightly west. The stretch between the arch and the fountain was flanked to the east by a portico; the west side has not been excavated. In front of that portico stood a series of at least twelve statue bases. All of these were put in their present position apparently in the fourth century. The southernmost carries an honorific statue of a doctor, Alexander; but another ten bases carried bronze statues of Victories, flanking a bronze statue of the empress Aelia Flaccilla, wife of Theodosius I, probably erected in around 383.⁴

The base for Aelia Flaccilla⁵ is not centered within the group of Victories: there seem to have been more to the north than to the south. On the paving immediately in front of the base for Aelia Flaccilla is an acclamation for the Green faction:⁶ The writing is at right angles to the street, and to be read from the north. Letters 0.035-0.05. To the left, a circle with 8 spokes, diam. 0.13. On the paving-stone to the east, a larger circle with four spokes, diam. 0.45, and a square with cross.⁷

² H. Thür, 'Die spätantike Bauphase der Kuretenstrasse', in R. Pillinger, O. Kresten, F. Krinzinger, E. Russo (eds.), *Efeso Paleocristiana e Bizantina* (Vienna 1999), pp. 104-20.

³ See F. Eichler, 'Franz Miltner', *JÖAI* 44 (1959), Beibl., p. 1.

⁴ 'The image of Victory: new evidence from Ephesus', in *Mélanges Gilbert Dagron*, Travaux et Mémoires 14 (Paris, 2002), pp. 527-46.

⁵ Copied by Miltner *Skizzenbuch* 2958, no. ix, whence Keil and Maresch, *JÖAI* 45 (1960) Beibl. pp. 85-86, no. 11, whence *AnnEpig* 1966,434, Malcus, *OAth* 7, 1967, pp. 116-17, no. 11, *IEph* 314 and Add p.8, whence *PHI* 2989; Roueché, 'Victory' no. 4.

⁶ *IEph*. 1198.2 from *Skizzenbuch* 2978; republished by C. Roueché, 'Looking for Late Antique Ceremonial: Ephesos and Aphrodisias'. H. Friesinger - F. Krinzinger (eds.), *100 Jahre Österreichische Forschungen in Ephesos. Akten des Symposions Wien 1995*, (Vienna, 1999), pp. 161-8. no. 14, cited eadem 'Victory', p. 546.

⁷ For an illustration see Roueché, 'Victory', p. 546.

Νικᾷ ἡ τύχη
Πρασινῶν

The fortune of Greens triumphs!

In an earlier discussion of this material, I pointed out the relevance of a passage of the Parastaseis:

In the Tribunal of the palace <a statue> of Eudocia, the wife of Theodosius (II, 408-50), the grandson of Theodosius (I, 379-95), and <statues> of Marcian (450-57) and Constantine (324-37); here many ceremonial dances of the Blues and Greens took place up to the reign of Heraclius (610-41).⁸

This text indicates the continuing function of important imperial statues in civic ceremonial in Constantinople. It seems to me entirely possible that the same kind of activity took place at Ephesus, and that the statue of the Empress, so impressively presented among the images of Victory, played an important part in the ceremonial landscape of the city. The presence of this inscription suggests, in my view, that this location had a significance for the Green faction. Ceremonial processions will have passed this point for several centuries – the lower part of the street was still an appropriate location for inscribing an imperial law as late as the reign of Maurice.⁹ I would argue that the Greens had a role in such events, and that this was one of the locations where they will have participated, with appropriate chants – and even dances.

This supposition is perhaps further strengthened by a more recent discovery. Immediately north of the base for the Aelia Flaccilla statue stands the next of the victory bases. There are clamp holes for a bronze statue on the top, and the back has been cut away to fit the block into position; there is moulding running round the upper and lower edges on three sides, and a moulded panel on the front. The principal text, within the panel on the front face, has been published.¹⁰ The excavators did not, however, record the further material

⁸ Parastaseis, section 36.

⁹ D. Feissel, 'Épigraphie administrative et topographie urbaine: l'emplacement des actes inscrits dans l'Éphèse protobyzantine (IVe-VIe s.)', in R. Pillinger et al. (eds.), *Efeso Paleocristiana*, pp. 121-32, especially 130-1.

¹⁰ Miltner, *Skizzenbuch* 2959, no. viii, whence *IEph* 526, *PHI* 872, Roueché 'Victory', no. 3

which is to be found on the south side of the same base – that is, the side facing the base of Aelia Flaccilla.

This face bears graffiti, cut below the moulding; they are only visible in certain lights, and are not easy to read. The following readings come from study by Denis Feissel and myself, and from a squeeze taken by Feissel.

There are at least two texts, perhaps 3 (depending on whether B and C should be read as a single text).

A, cut just below the moulding, is barely legible, Line 1 is in small letters, 0.008-0.01. Line 2 is in larger letters, 0.02, with traces of an attempt to erase them

Text B is in large and sprawling letters, with lunate forms, 0.03-04.

Text C is a monogram, 0.06, which has been erased.

At the lower edge of the face there are traces of two further lines, erased.

A.

ΑΒΟΡΤΙΠΟΤΟ
ΔΑΜΙΓCΙΟ
Μ

B.

ὁ θεὸς Γεωργίου
ἀνέγειρον τὸ
μέρος τοῦ ὕδατος

C.

(Πρακινῶν)

It was Denis Feissel who first interpreted text B, by identifying the verb at the end of the third line as οἶδας.

God of George, raise up the party which you know.

The word μέρος is well known as one of the Greek terms used to translate the Latin. It was used of a variety of different groups in society; but it is particularly often used

of the partisans of the circus colours.¹¹ The prayer here is for God to help a ‘party’ whose name is not spelled out, since it is already known to God. But, below the text of B, C is a monogram, which is the same as others on the site, and can be resolved as the genitive plural of Prasini, The Greens.

It is not clear whether we should read *τον* in line B. 3 as an accusative, treating it as an (incorrect) masculine pronoun, or as a genitive plural. The latter is more likely, with the attraction of the relative pronoun: the faction of those you know. The phrase here is a variant of the widespread formula, ‘whose name God knows’, which is particularly familiar from Christian donor’s inscriptions.

The formula is most commonly found in Greek, and the fullest current account has been given by Feissel.¹² He knew at that time of some 40 examples, and others continue to appear. The formula varies between a singular and a plural of the anonymised person/persons. Feissel drew attention to variants in the construction – ‘whose name God/the Lord knows’, in the third person, or ‘whose name you know’. He also pointed out the different verbs used (*γινώσκω*, *οἶδα*, *ἐπίσταμαι*) which show some regional variation, as well as drawing attention to the use of the phrase as an *ex voto*: *εὐχὴ οὔ*.

By far the largest number of examples come from mosaics, principally mosaic floors;¹³ some inscribed examples come from flooring panels which may well have been associated

¹¹ Alan Cameron, *Circus Factions* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 14-16.

¹² *Recueil des inscriptions chrétiennes de Macédoine, du IIIe au VIe siècle* (Paris, 1983), p. 110, on no 104, to which he added when publishing an inscription from Mallos, G. Dagron and D. Feissel, *Inscriptions de Cilicie* (Paris, 1987), no. 73; see also James Russell, *The mosaic inscriptions of Anemurium* (Vienna, 1987) on no 10.

¹³ J-P. Caillet, ‘Les dédicaces privées de pavements de mosaïque à la fin de l’Antiquité’ in X Barral I Altet, *Artistes, artisans et production au Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1986), II, *Commande et travail*, pp. 15-38, esp. 26-27. For the east: M. Avi Yonah, ‘Mosaic pavements in Palestine’, *QDAP* II (1933), followed and supplemented by A. and R. Ovadiah, *Mosaic pavements in Israel* (Rome, 1987); D. Feissel ‘L’épigraphie des églises en Syrie et au Liban’, in *Ant Tard* 2 (1994), pp. 285-91 complementing and developing the information in P. Donceel-Voûte, *Les pavements des églises en Syrie et au Liban* (Louvain, 1988). For the Balkans G. Babicracters, ‘North Chapel of the Quatrefoil Church of Ohrid and its mosaic floors’, *Zbornik Radova* 13 (1971), pp. 266-9.

with mosaics.¹⁴ There are also examples on Christian silverware; I. Sevcenko discussed the examples in the Sion treasure, where the phrase is found on two chalices. It is also found on other items of liturgical silver - censers, patens and crosses.¹⁵ The text is twice found on in baptistery buildings, at Bethlehem and (on a font) in Rhodes.¹⁶

These texts are found in Syria/Palestine, Asia Minor, Cyprus and the Islands, Greece and the Balkans. The formula also appears in other languages: the equivalent phrase, 'cuius nomen Deus scit' is found in the Latin world;¹⁷ It is used in donors' inscriptions in mosaic floors in Aquileia, Grado and Porec¹⁸ From Palestine, Avi-Yonah published an example from an Armenian church in a funerary chapel, probably 6th century: 'For the memory and salvation of all the Armenians, whose names the Lord knows'.¹⁹ And it is not limited to Christians. It is found in at least two synagogues in Palestine. One example, in Greek, is found in a sixth century floor at Beth Shean/Scythopolis.²⁰ Another example is from a

¹⁴ So Dagron-Feissel, *Inscriptions de Cilicie* no. 73 whence *SEG* 37 (1997), 1315; from Vergina a marble plaque in the floor of the narthex of a basilica (so probably referring to the mosaic flooring): ὑπὲρ εὐχῆς οὗ ὁ Θεός οἶδεν τὸ [ὄνομα], published by K. Loverdou-Tsigarida, *Papers for Laskarina Boura* (Athens, 1994), pp. 155-63, whence *SEG* 34 (1994), 564, D. Feissel, *Bulletin Epigraphique* 1996.602; M. Piccirillo and E. Alliata, *Umm al-Rasas I* (Jerusalem, 1994) publishing the excavations of the Church of St Stephen, whence *SEG* 34 (1994), 1404, D. Feissel, *BullEp* 1996.503, no 24, a white marble fragment: [ὑπὲρ πάντ]ηλήψεος ὧν Κ(ύριος)ς γηνόσ[κει τὰ ὀνό]ματα.

¹⁵ I. Sevcenko, 'The Sion treasure: the evidence of the inscriptions', in S. Boyd and M. Mundell Mango (eds.), *Ecclesiastical silver plate in sixth-century Byzantium* (Washington, 1993), pp. 39-56: text no. 19: εὐχὴ ὧν ὁ θεὸς τὰ ὀνόματα οἶδεν is found on 2 chalices (complete on no 9, fragmentary on 10) and discussed, p. 42.

¹⁶ Bethlehem: *CIG* 8867, with no indication of the precise location; Rhodes: *SEG* 38 (1988), 793, from I. A. Volonakis, *Arch.Delt.* 35 (1980), B 573.

¹⁷ G. Pugliese Carratelli, 'Cuius nomen deus scit', *Studi mediolatini e volgari* 1 (1953), pp. 193-6, reprinted in G. Pugliese Carratelli, *Scritti sul mondo antico* (Naples, 1976), pp. 500-4.

¹⁸ J.-P. Caillet, *L'évergétisme monumental chrétien en Italie et à ses marges* (Rome, 1993), and A. Zettler, *Offerenteninschriften auf den frühchristlichen Mosaikfußböden Venetiens und Istriens* (Berlin, 2000), omitting cross references to Caillet. Aquileia, Monastery church: Caillet p. 189, no. 38, Zettler, p. 178, no. 38; S. Maria, Grado: Caillet, p. 207; S. Eufemia, Grado: Caillet, p. 243, Zettler, p. 208, no. 7; S. Eufemia, Grado: Caillet, p. 243, Zettler, p. 202, no. 32, J. Brusin, *Inscriptiones Aquileiae* (Udine, 1991-1993), 3359; Porec: Caillet, p. 311, Zettler, p. 225, no. 2.

¹⁹ M. Avi-Yonah, 'Mosaic pavements in Palestine', *QDAP* II (1933), no. 132.

²⁰ Beth Shean, in the Kyrios Leontios complex, Ovadia, *Mosaic pavements*, no 31, B: Πρ(οσφορὰ) ὧν | Κ(ύριος)ς γινώσκει τὰ | ὀνόματ|α. αὐτὸς| φυλάξει ἐν | χρό(νοις). A

synagogue near Jericho, in a mosaic floor of the late 6th or early 7th century. The text is in Hebrew, not naming the donors, but stating: 'He who knows their names and (the names) of their children and (the names) of the people of their households shall/may he (Ovadia) write them in the Book of Life'.²¹ This is only one example of an interchange of formulae between Jews and Christians.²²

The Latin version – but apparently not the Greek – is also found in funerary texts. Pugliese Carratelli cites an example from Clermont, Gaul: ²³

'in hac parte huius tumuli requiescunt corpora s(an)c(t)orum quoru(m) nomina D(eu)s scit . . . in hac altera parte . . . septem innocentiu(m) quorum nomina sint apud Deum.'

In a case like this it might be reasonable to imagine that the phrase is used to cover some uncertainty. There could be people buried here whose names were in fact unknown to the writer of the inscription. Practical considerations of this kind could also apply to some of the donors' inscriptions. In the case, for example, of the Jericho synagogue inscription, Levine takes this as a way of describing the whole community.²⁴ Another formula which is widespread is one recording the efforts of those 'who have contributed and are contributing', καρποφορησάντων καὶ καρποφορούντων, again a phrase which can include as many benefactors as possible.²⁵ A similarly open usage is that found in a synagogue inscription: 'Peace be upon everyone who has fulfilled the commandment in this holy place, and who will fulfil the commandment'²⁶ Inscriptions of this kind are intended to include rather than exclude.

brief discussion P. Baumann *Spätantike Stifter im heiligen Land* (Wiesbaden, 1999), p. 296, *SEG* 49 (1999), 2444, to be consulted with caution: see Feissel, *BullEp* 2000.675.

²¹ D. Baramki, 'An early Byzantine synagogue near Tell es Sultan, Jericho', *QDAP* 6 (1938), pp. 73-77, 76; republished, A and R. Ovadia, *Mosaic pavements*, no. 108. see also J. Naveh, 'Ancient Synagogue inscriptions' in L. I. Levine (ed.), *Ancient Synagogues revealed* (Jerusalem, 1981), pp. 133-9, 138-9.

²² See T. Rajak, *The Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome* (Brill, 2001), pp. 387-8.

²³ F. Le Blant, *Recueil des Inscriptions chrétiennes de la Gaule antérieures au VIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1856-8) II, no. 563

²⁴ L. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue* (Yale, 2000), pp. 361-2.

²⁵ For example, Avi-Yonah no. 62, Ovadia, *Mosaic pavements*, no. 86; discussion at Sevcenko p. 43, note 38.

²⁶ Ovadia, *Mosaic pavements*, no. 87

This kind of practical consideration might explain some uses of the phrase, but not all. Pugliese Carratelli also drew attention to two cases of funerary texts, where the phrase is used with a name, from Marseille,²⁷

hic iacet Gemula, cu<ius> nomen <De>us iscit
and Chiusi²⁸

Hic positus est peregrinus Ciconias, cuius [no]men Deus scit.

A similar usage is also found in a donor's inscription from Syria which has recently been published:²⁹

Κύριε μνήσθητι τῆς δο[ύλη]ς σου Θίας ἥς τὸ ὄνο[μ]α γινώσκεις

In all these cases the name which is given may have a different status to that which is known to God. Pugliese Carratelli drew attention to the tradition that believers had a 'true' name, which was theirs in heaven.³⁰ This concept is itself a variant on a more widespread belief, that the names (secret or not) of the faithful are recorded in heaven. In this connection it is of course relevant that the formula of anonymity is twice found inscribed in baptisteries (above, note 16). The key text for Christians is Paul's letter to the Philippians: ὧν τὰ ὀνόματα ἐν βίβλῳ ζῶντος;³¹ this phrase is picked up in early Christian texts,³² and becomes widespread in the patristic period. In most cases, however, the Christian inscriptions do not include the reference to the Book of Life, an Old Testament concept which is echoed in the Gospels and in the Apocalypse.³³ That is apparently only found in the Jericho synagogue mosaic, and in a Christian inscription at Amida, where, however, the readings are not entirely clear.³⁴ The term perhaps needed interpretation for Christians: Asterius refers to 'the memory of God', which is the 'living book':

²⁷ E. Diehl, *Inscriptiones Latinae Christiane Veteres* I (xxx, 1925), 1926d.

²⁸ Diehl, *ILCV* 2497

²⁹ A. Zaqzuq and M. Piccirillo. 'Inscriptions on the mosaic floor at the church of the Holy martyrs at Epiphaneia, Syria', *Liber Annuus* 49 (1999) pp. 43-46, 44, no 6, whence *SEG* 49 (1999), 2001, Feissel, *Bullep* 2002.462.

³⁰ G. Pugliese Carratelli, 'Cuius nomen deus scit', 195-6

³¹ *Philippians* 4.3.

³² e.g. Hippolytus, *Commentarium in Daniele*, 4.56.6; *Constitutiones apostolorum*, 8.9.12.

³³ The idea is in Exodus 32.32, developed in Psalm 68.29: ἐξαλειφθήτωσαν ἐκ βίβλου ζώντων. It is taken up in Apocalyptic writing – so Daniel 12.1, and several times in the Revelation of John; the Gospel of Luke refers to names being written in heaven (10.20).

³⁴ M. von Oppenheim and H. Lucas, 'Inschriften aus Syrien, Mesopotamien und Kleinasien', *BZ* 14 (1905), pp. 1-72, no. 99, from Diabekir, previously *CIG* IV.8653.

οὐδὲ τῇ μνήμῃ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐγγραφῆναι ζητεῖς; τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ βίβλος ἡ ζῶσα.³⁵

All of this suggests that these formulae of anonymity may well have meant different things to different people in different places, just as is clearly the case with some other religious formulae - most obviously, the abbreviation ΧΜΓ.³⁶ They may, for some, have referred to another name, recorded only in heaven. For others, they may have demonstrated the faith of the believer that God does not need to be told who has made the offering. In some cases, they may reflect humility; and in some cases, where the plural is used, they may be intended to encompass as many donors as possible, or even to include persons whose names are simply not known to those making the inscription.

Our understanding of these interpretations has developed as more examples of the formula and its derivatives have appeared. The new text from Ephesus, however, cannot be explained in any of these ways. The phrase here is invoking God's help for a group, apparently a circus faction, while avoiding mentioning their name. The only possible reason for such a periphrasis would seem to be the need to avoid *phthonos*, the Evil Eye. Such a concern makes good sense in the context of the factions. The fierce competition between them was regularly enhanced by the use of magic, as we know from the abundant curse tablets which have been discovered, invoking magic to help defeat the competitors of a particular faction. Names are of course an essential element in magic: the majority of the curses that we have spell out the names of those curses, including in some cases the names of chariot-horses being cursed.³⁷

It may be that this interpretation also has implications for some of the other inscriptions mentioned above. Inscriptions referring to the need to ward off *phthonos* are found on several mosaic floors; the fullest recent discussion arises from analysis of a mosaic from

³⁵ Asterius IV.8.4.

³⁶ See, most recently, D. Feissel, *BullEp* 2002.594.

³⁷ D. Jordan, 'New Defixiones from Carthage' in J. H. Humphrey, *The circus and a Byzantine cemetery at Carthage* Vol. 1 (Ann Arbor, 1988), pp. 117-34; J. G. Gager, *Curse tablets and binding spells from the ancient world* (Oxford, 1992), Chapter 1 gives translations of 17 curse tablet concerned with performance, of which 7 refer to factions. More material is awaiting publication: see, for example, F. Heintz, 'Magic Tablets and the Games at Antioch' in C. Kondoleon ed, *Antioch, the Lost ancient city* (Princeton, 2000), pp. 163-7.

Skala, on Kephallenia, with a representation of Phthonos.³⁸ The ancient literary discussions are rooted in discussions of the moral aspects of envy – it damages and destroys the envious person. But it also becomes transmuted into an external force; and literary descriptions of *phthonos/invidia*, likening it to a snake or a scorpion, are a first step towards portraying it not just as a human characteristic but as an autonomous power.³⁹ Moreover, the first aspect of the envious person is that he looks at that which he envies: from this comes the concept of the glance full of envy and loathing which conveys ill fortune on the person looked upon – that is, the Evil Eye.⁴⁰ While the Church Fathers tried to rationalize this, pointing out that the evil lay in the soul of the envious person, it is clear that this idea was widely established in late Antiquity, and indeed the Eye was actually represented.⁴¹ Such concerns were in no way limited to pagans: for example an invocation against *phthonos*, ὁ φθονῶν λακίση is found in a monastic cell in Kellia.⁴² Many inscriptions and images intended to ward off *phthonos* were found in the entrances to buildings.⁴³ But there is a particular need to protect the luxurious or lavish item. It would seem to be the luxury and pleasure of baths that made them vulnerable to *phthonos*.⁴⁴ This could explain the inscriptions warding off *phthonos* from mosaics, whose beauty might invite it: thus, in the case of an Aramaic inscription at Beth Shean, ‘remembered be for good the artisan who made this work’ the Ovadiahs suggest that this anonymous formulation might be to avoid the evil eye.⁴⁵ It may be that some of the anonymous donors’ inscriptions were also motivated by a wish to avoid such envy evoked by splendour – which could well explain their appearance not only on mosaics, but also on ecclesiastical silver.

If at least in this particular case the principal aim is to avoid spelling out the name of the faction, in order to avoid *phthonos*, it is of great interest that our inscription is followed by the name of the faction written in the form of a monogram. Other factional monograms have been recorded at Ephesus. Further north, down the Embolos, ran an arcade of

³⁸ K. M. D. Dunbabin and M. Dickie, ‘*Invida rumpantur pectora*. The iconography of *phthonos/invidia* in Graeco-Roman art’, *JbAC* 26 (1983), pp. 7-37.

³⁹ *ibid*, pp. 18-19.

⁴⁰ *ibid*, pp. 10-11.

⁴¹ *ibid*, pp. 31-2.

⁴² Fournet, *ZPE* 117 (1997) pp. 163-4, whence *SEG* 44.1457.

⁴³ Dunbabin and Dickie, p. 36, and L. Robert, *Hellenica* 13 (Paris, 1965), p. 266.

⁴⁴ K. M. D. Dunbabin, ‘Baiaurum grata voluptas’, *PBSR* 44 (1989), pp. 6-46, 33-46.

⁴⁵ Ovadiah, *Mosaic pavements*, no. 31B and p. 180.

columns whose simple capitals remain in situ. On one two monograms are inscribed in the volutes⁴⁶

(Νικᾷ ἡ τύχη) (τῶν Πρασίνων)

The fortune of the Greens triumphs!

On another capital as well as monograms in each of the volutes, there is a line of text on the very plain moulding between them:⁴⁷

(ὀρθοδόξων) *cross* Χριστιανῶν β[α]σιλέων (Πρασίνων)

(For) Christian emperors ?(and) orthodox Greens (*or* (For) orthodox Christian emperors (and) Greens)

The factional acclamations at Ephesus are concentrated principally in the ‘Marble Street’, at the north end of the Embolos, leading to the Theatre. Several of these have been published;⁴⁸ but another, unpublished, is on a column of the ‘Neronian Halle’, the portico at the west side of the street. On the face of the column facing the street is a monogram, 0.25 in height, 0.17 wide; it can be resolved:

(Νικᾷ ἡ τύχη τῶν Πρασίνων)

The fortune of the Greens triumphs!

That monogram remained unpublished because, although it is very clearly visible, I simply failed to recognize and interpret it. This failure perhaps reflects an essential element in the function of monograms: they marked the space in a way evident only to those in the know. They could not easily be read out or spoken. In the case of the factions, we can understand why this might be desirable; as has been said, such anonymity might be a way to avoid *phthonos* and magic.

Monograms have received a rather negative response from modern scholars, not least because they are so often hard to interpret: they have even been described as a mark of

⁴⁶ Roueché, ‘Ceremonial’ no. 13.

⁴⁷ Roueché, ‘Ceremonial’ no. 12.

⁴⁸ Roueché, ‘Ceremonial’, nos. 1-8; see also C. Roueché, ‘From Aphrodisias to Stauropolis’, in J. Drinkwater and R. Salway (ed.), *Wolf Liebeschuetz Reflected*, (London, 2006).

diminishing education, whose use increased as the level of education declined.⁴⁹ They are, however, a very efficient way of individualising a seal: and Pliny the Elder tells us that the use of seals in private life was becoming widespread in his time (*NH* 33.26).⁵⁰ From the fourth century, monograms seem to have become widespread on seals: they seem to have been popular during the fourth to sixth centuries, principally on hardstone signets, and in the eighth to ninth centuries on metal rings.⁵¹ As Walter Fink pointed out, the ancient sources make clear that a monogram is not a word, but a 'signum';⁵² in some cases – perhaps only in the west – the monogram actually includes S, or SI for 'signum'.⁵³ This can also be included in a text which is not written as a monogram 'this is the mark/seal/sign of so-and so'.⁵⁴ Its prime purpose, therefore, is not to be read, but to ensure security, as Symmachus implies in writing to his brother Flavianus:⁵⁵

Non minore sane cura cupio cognoscere, an omnes obsignatas epistulas sumpseris eo anulo, quo nomen meum magis intellegi quam legi promptum est.

'I am equally keen to know whether you receive all (my) letters sealed with that ring on which my name can more easily be recognised than read.'

Similarly Avitus, Bishop of Vienne, wrote to his brother Apollinaris, bishop of Valence, in 507 or shortly after, with his specifications in response to his brother's offer to give him a signet ring, which is however over-elegantly described for real clarity:

Si quaeras, quid insculpendum sigillo: signum monogrammatidis mei per gyrum scripti nominis legatur indicio (Ep. 87).

'If you ask what is to be engraved on the seal: let the sign of my monogram written in a circle be read as evidence of my name'.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ 'L'emploi devint plus fréquent à mesure que l'ignorance envahissait toutes les classes de la population, même celle des clercs et des dignitaires de l'Église', H. Leclercq, paraphrasing Mabillon, 'Monogramme', in F. Cabrol and H. Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* XI (Paris 1934), pp. 2369-94, 2371.

⁵⁰ See also G. Vikan, 'Sealing', in J. Nesbitt and G. Vikan, *Security in Byzantium* (Dumbarton Oaks, 1980), pp. 10-28, 10.

⁵¹ Vikan, 'Sealing', pp. 17-19.

⁵² W. Fink. 'Neue Deutungsvorschläge zu einigen byzantinischen Monogrammen', *Byzantios. Festschrift Hunger* (Vienna, 1984), pp. 85-94, 85-6.

⁵³ Leclercq, art. cit., pp. 2370-4.

⁵⁴ cf. e.g. M. Marcovich, 'A Latin seal-ring from Naissus', *ZPE* 54 (1984), pp. 219-20.

⁵⁵ Symmachus, *Ep.* II.12 (perhaps c. 385) ed. G. A. Cecconi (Pisa, 2002), with commentary, p. 179.

⁵⁶ D. Shanzer and I. Wood trans., *Avitus of Vienne: letters and selected prose*

The most obvious reason for the use of a monogram, of course, is to save space – particularly on a seal ring – and to do so in a way which is individual.⁵⁷ But it is far less obvious why it would be used in an inscription on stone, where space is not an issue. There are monograms on the seats in the Theatre at Aphrodisias, and this could perhaps be explained by the idea of a signum as marking ownership.⁵⁸ But their use in a monumental setting requires more explanation. It seems reasonable to argue that their use by the factions at Ephesus and at Aphrodisias may reflect a wish to conceal the name from ill-wishers. What is worth considering is whether this was also a reason for the use of monograms by donors in Christian buildings – most obviously Justinian and Theodora in Hagia Sophia. By the sixth century while an inscription was still an appropriate adornment for a public building, it was perhaps no longer perceived as a simple document of record. The imperial couple placed their mark on their building in a way which could not immediately be deciphered, yet which was uniquely theirs; it is worth noting that monograms were also coming into increasing use on seals in this period.⁵⁹ Like the anonymous donors who took the trouble to have an inscription made that did not include their name, they had the satisfaction of knowing that their names were known to God.

Appendix

Denis Feissel, who has made a very full collection of the material, offers a further contribution to the discussion of the use of anonymity formulae in funerary inscriptions (above, p. xxx). He writes:

Il y a à ma connaissance une seule épitaphe grecque de ce genre, l'exception confirmant la règle. Comme elle est très peu connue, et n'a pas été correctement restituée, je donne ici quelques précisions.

X. A. Sideridès, *Konst. Phil. Syllogos* 32 (1911) 133, no. 2, épitaphe de Constantinople trouvée près de Tophane. La pierre est mutilée d'un côté (à droite). Je lis d'après le fac-similé:

(Liverpool 2002), p. 252.

⁵⁷ V. Gardthausen art. 'Monogramm', *RE* XVI.1 (1933), 133-43, 139-40 (Leipzig, 1924).

⁵⁸ C. Roueché, *Performers and Partisans at Aphrodisias* (London, 1993), no. 46.H.8.iii, H.9.iii

⁵⁹ W. Fink, 'Das frühbyzantinische Monogramm', *JÖB* 30 (1981), pp. 75-86.

(*croix*) Ἐνθάδε κατάκ[ι]-
τε ὁ τῆς μακαρίας
μνήμης οὗ οἶδεν ὁ [Θ(εὸ)ς]
τὸ ὄνομα (*croix*)

Sideridès croyait lire οὗ οἶδεν οὐ τὸ ὄνομα, (“la deuxième lettre de la négation manque mais se restitue sans peine”), et pensait à la sépulture des corps abandonnés.